

ural integrity had been undermined. She found out different when she wore the shoes to the Labor Day dance in front of the fountain at the mall

She and Clete danced the jitterbug and foxtrot to the music of the jazz quintet and its lady singer who specialized in the tunes of Cole Porter. After a lively 'I Get a Kick Out of You,' that had Juanita doing some high can-can kicks that further weakened an already damaged heel, she and Clete headed for the escalator, enroute to the little Italian restaurant's sidewalk bar.

Clete followed his wife onto the moving metal stairs. When they swooped upward out of their brief horizontal slide, the slight increase in gravity caused by the sudden uplift proved to be the damaged heel's last straw. It shook and vibrated under Juanita, and when she had ridden halfway to the second level it gave way, broke at its weakest point and sent her tumbling backwards, a roll — in the escalator's narrow confines — that collected all the lower altitude riders the way a rolling cartoon snowball collects more snow.

The multi-colored ball burst apart at the bottom of the ride, and bodies scattered like an exercise in entropy, slid and spun like compass needles on the buffed floor. Then a series of random fistfights broke out, with nobody involved in the roll-and-tumble affair being exactly sure who was to blame.

Clete dabbed at a cut on his forehead then grabbed Juanita's hand and led her away from the fray. She limped along with him, and he said, "There must be a place on the bottom floor where we can get a drink."

AMBER BLUES

After working out with the Loma Alta Brass Band in a late afternoon blowing session out on Clete Johnson's patio, in a partially successful attempt to move the repertoire into Fats Waller territory, Bob Urp stashed his alto sax in the back seat of his Hyundai and drove down to the sea shore. His agenda was a slow and aimless cruise, to kill time; ever since Glenda's mother had moved in, he had been avoiding his castle regularly

He bought a monster can of malt liquor and a pint of bourbon at Bonita Liquor and hit Pacific Street, turned left on that two-lane ribbon of blacktop that rolled out along the bluff top overlooking the city's cobbly beaches. The gulls rode the updrafts that blew up the face of the bluff,

and then they spiraled upwards, bombing the once upscale motels that had long since devolved into low-rate weekly rentals. Bob kept the car in second gear, rolled down the front windows to catch the briny cross-draft as the ocean sucked the orange glob of the sun into its cool depths. He downshifted into first and slowed to a walk at the sight of the sun-browned adolescent legs clipping along in his direction on the sidewalk to his right, a black guitar case swaying at their side.

He passed the girl, cut a left on Wisconsin Street and looped around the block before he crept up behind her and angled to the curb, pulled even and called out the front passenger window, "Hey, you need a ride?" with fluttering thoughts of adding another fairly rare black mark to his record of near-monogamy with Glenda.

The girl, blonde curls bouncing, turned without breaking stride and replied, "How far you goin'?" Bob steered around a parked Honda and cut back to the curb and said, with his thirty-seven year old heart hammering the inside of his sternum, "As far as you want to."

She stopped abruptly and left-faced, placed her free hand on her slim hip and said, "Look man, I'm late for my band practice and all I need's a fucking ride; I don't need some asshole older than my father trying to get into my pants." Bob leaned across the seat and opened the passenger door for her. "Get in," he said, "Practice is important. You wanna be a musician, you gotta practice." She hesitated then stepped off the curb and leaned over and said, "You play, man?" Bob nodded, jerked his thumb at the back seat and said, "Alto sax — slip your guitar back there; those two can keep each company."

Practice was on a patio in a red-tile-roof neighborhood in a terrace cut into a hillside on the eastern boundary of the city, top-of-the-line Toyotas parked at the curbs. Bob sat in, blew notes around the looping bass plucking and strumming chords. It was Robert Johnson blues, Amber moaning for her life and coaxing barb-wire sounds out of her guitar strings. When they played themselves out they stripped down and slipped into the turquoise pool that was riding high with a full-moon bulge, all of them except for Bob, who held onto his sax and blew into Fats Waller's 'Ain't Misbehavin', straight through one time before packing up and heading home.

WHITE STATIC

Bob Urp's mother-in-law, Eloise (Ellie) Morgan, thinks they talk to her through the crackle of white static on the T.V. late at night, when the stations have shut down. Spirits.